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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR - LLUFTIG
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SUBJECT: SURINAME'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY REACTS PEACEFULLY TO
DANISH CARTOON CONTROVERSY

REF: SECSTATE 20587

1.(U) Summary. On February 7 the three major Surinamese Muslim associations issued a joint press statement condemning the publication of Danish political cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohamed in European newspapers, while at the same time condemned the violent protests that have ensued. The organizations heavily criticized European countries as intolerant of other religions and races, and pledged to deliberate over the most effective manner of peaceful protest. There has been little other public reaction in Suriname to the controversy, whose 13.5 percent Muslim population per 2004 census is considered moderate. Post has seen no evidence of an official Government of Suriname (GOS) position or statement on the cartoon controversy. End Summary.

12. (U) The statement from the Madjilies Moesliemien Suriname (MMS), the Verbond (Union) van Islamitische Organisaties in Suriname (VIS), and the Surinaamse Moesliem Associatie (SMA) was printed/covered in two popular daily newspapers, De Ware Tijd and Dagblad Suriname. The statement argues that there is a climate of non-tolerance and institutional racism in Europe in which non-whites are expected to dress, eat, act, think, and speak like the white majority. The organizations claimed the West often has double standards when it comes to freedom of press, and that only press criticism against Muslims is tolerated.

13. (U) The Muslim associations condemned the violence associated with the protests in places such as Syria and Lebanon and said this wrongful behavior creates a negative image of Islam. The organizations pledged to deliberate over the most effective and peaceful manner to protest the issue. The associations also stated that if international organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC) and the Arab League, call for a collective boycott of European goods, they would seriously consider joining the international effort. They would also consider joining any proposed push to advise consumers to avoid European products by buying goods from the United States, Brazil, Venezuela, and Asia.

14. (U) Doctor Izaak Jamaludin, president of SMA, reiterated the statement's points in a radio interview on February 7. He said his association would soon request a meeting of Suriname's Inter-Religious Council, in which possible sanctions against those countries that are perceived to insult Islam will be proposed. Jamaludin emphasized that Islam always calls for peace and never for violence.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) In light of the peaceful statements made by Suriname's major Muslim associations, the absence of an official statement by the GOS, and a muted public reaction, Post will not deliver the reftel demarche, rather use points to respond to any queries.

BARNES